HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

O.H 52

A. RONALD BUTTON

INTERVEWED BY

PATRICIA YOUNG

MAY 23, 1980

INTERVIEWEE: A. RONALD BUTTON

INTERVIEWER: Patricia Young

SUBJECT:

DATE: 23 May 1980

TRANSCRIBER: Linda A. Jantzen

PY: This is an interview with Ronald Button for the Historical Society of Palm Desert Oral History Project on May 23, 1980, Friday, at ten-thirty in the morning, at his home on Thunderbird Road in Rancho Mirage.

Let's just begin by talking about how you came to the area and what interested you here.

RB: I was and am an attorney, and I was in a large law office in Los Angeles who represented the man who built and owned the El Mirador Hotel. And after I had graduated from Stanford Law School and started practicing law in that firm, they asked me if I would come down and meet with the elderly gentleman that owned the El Mirador and handle all of his legal work. And this was the first time I had ever been to the desert which was about 1930, well, actually around 1932, 1933, I guess, so I

handled all of his legal work, which meant coming back and forth to the desert quite often. And it was no ways what it is now by any means. As I remember there was the El Mirador and the other hotel down at the other end. Can't recall the name. Howard Ahmanson bought it finally and tore it down. And it has the Ahmanson Shopping Center on it now. But there wasn't much development in Palm Springs at that time. Dirt road. People rode bicycles. Just a nice quiet little community. So that was my first experience with it, but I was in the service in World War II and I contracted some sort of pneumonia and was in the hospital in Pasadena for several weeks and they finally released me on the condition that I go to Palm Springs and get a lot of sun for about three weeks. And they gave me a three-week leave of absence. So I came, I could have stayed at the El Mirador at Mr. Stevens' hotel but I called a friend of mine who I heard had a house down there. I preferred a house for three weeks and did have it. I said, where is it? And he said it's in a place called Rancho Mirage. And I said, where's Rancho Mirage? And he said, oh, it's about ten miles out of Palm Springs. You won't have any trouble finding it. He said, there's

only one other house there, and that's Frank Morgan's house. And I said, well, I know Frank Morgan but I don't know where his house is. Well, he said, you won't have any trouble. There isn't anything else there. So I counted ten miles from Cathedral City. Sure enough, looked up and there were two houses setting up there. And I went up, found the correct address, the key worked, and so I knew I was in the right place. And I was in pretty bad shape, so for a couple of weeks I just did what the doctors told me to do, just rest. But finally I got feeling very good and started walking around. And one day Mr. Culver, who was an old friend of mine, came down. He said, I don't want to bother you. I just want to see if everything is all right. Yes, everything's fine. A little lonesome here. There isn't much around here, is there? No, he said, actually this is owned by the Citizen National Trust and Savings Bank and they're the trustee for several hundred beneficial interest owners of certificates. Oh. Well, he said, I'd like, actually I'm representing them as their managing salesman. What are you selling? He said, well, we have a few lots here for sale. I wonder if I could interest you in a lot. And so they had subdivided a very tiny

piece of land and they had a few, about fifty lots I think. I said, what are you asked for the lots? And he said two hundred and fifty dollars. I said, well, I've walked around here quite a bit since I've been here and I would be interested in buying the whole area. Oh. He said that would be impossible because the trustee, as I told you, is the Citizens National Trust and Savings Bank and they have several hundred beneficial interests and they're scattered all over the world. The Jans Brothers, quite a few big companies in Los Angeles have been trying to buy it and they can't do it because they can't get title land. And nobody wants to buy just a few interests. And I said, well, I'm not interested in one lot, but I am interested in the whole thing and would you mind if I go in and talk to the Citizens Bank. No, fine with me. All I do, I just come down here once in awhile and sell a lot or two, and it doesn't mean anything to me financially. So I went in and they were kind enough to give me a list of all the beneficial interests and their addresses. Some of them were in Europe. Some of them were in Japan. A lot of them were in the east. And so I just started out slowly picking up these beneficial interests, and I finally got the hundred percent. The

last man was a vice president of Standard Oil in Japan. And he was the most difficult because he had a hundred acres right in the middle of it. And he said nothing had ever happened to it. He inherited it. Didn't have any money in it and he really didn't want to sell it. There were letters back and forth, but finally he wrote me and he said that he lived in the New England states, I've forgotten now, Rhode Island, I think it was, and he said, we're coming out for a month. And if you want to come to our home there, we'd be glad to sit down and talk about it. So I thought, well, I guess that's the way you have to do business with him. You can't do it by mail. So I flew back there, and they didn't even want to talk about it. I was there a week in their home. They just, if you understand some of the New Englanders, he was that type. Don't let's hurry, don't hurry anything. Let's just take our time, talk and visit. He wanted to get acquainted with me and wanted to know what I'd done and what I was doing. And I told him exactly what I was planning to do here. Why do you need our hundred acres? I really don't need it, but I'll have all this acreage. I had to see one hundred acres in the middle. It could be spoiled by something that isn't comparable of what I

had in mind. That's really why I'd like to buy it. But I own everything else, so if you don't want to sell it, it's perfectly all right. Well, he said, are you going to build any houses? Oh, yes, I've already started to build some houses. Well, we want to come out there anyway and look at the property before we sell it. And if you have a house that we could take in on trade, if we like it, we might do that, so he did. He and his wife came out. If you know the people in the New England states, they're rather slow to move. I stayed out here about a week. They liked the one house that I showed them and I said, you can see. Oh, he said, I see our hundred acres is just about in the middle. Well, not quite, but it's a strategic piece of property. There's no question about it. And that's one of the reasons why I'd like to have it. Well, we certainly would never develop it. We inherited it, didn't cost us anything, so I'll make a deal with you. And he gave me a price plus the house that was too high and I said, you'd made a deal. So that's how I acquired that. And other than that, I had the whole thing. It was pretty close to five thousand acres all together.

PY: What was the average price you paid for an acre?

RB: Oh, I think, well, in his case, I paid a thousand dollars, but that was way too high at that time, as a matter of fact. Most of it I think averaged me, as I got down toward the end of these beneficial interests, it kept getting more and more expensive, of course. I guess I averaged probably three hundred an acre maximum for the whole five thousand acres. And I started out subdividing and selling lots, and nobody was interested in lots. They'd come out here from Palm Springs or from Indio and look at them. Well, there isn't anything out here. Well, I said, there's utilities and water. We have everything that you need to build a house. Well, we wouldn't know anything about building a house. Well, I'd only built three houses just to sample and they'd been sold. And I soon discovered that lots, they weren't interested in because they said it's out in nowhere. It's in between Indio and Palm Springs. There's no activity here of any kind. And I said, well, if you just want to hold it for speculation, some day it will be worth some real money to you. No. If we had a house, we might come down here once in awhile. So, but they didn't want to, nobody wanted to take the trouble to find an architect or have me find one and they go ahead

individually. If you ever build a house, here's our address and telephone number. Call us and then we'd be interested in looking at it. So I went into Palm Springs to the Bank of America and I knew the manager there real well and told him that I'd decided that I was going to forget selling lots. I was going to build houses on them. And he said, well, I think you're absolutely right about that, Ron. Well, the reason I'm talking to you is I want to get a loan for the houses and I'd like to do thirty houses at a time, thirty or forty at a time. Where did you say this was? And I said, well, it's called Rancho Mirage and it's halfway between Indio and Palm Springs, about ten miles out of Palm Springs. He started laughing. And he said, gee, I hate to tell you this, but he said, I can tell you some, you know I've been here for years, and I know you represent the El Mirador, Mr. Stevens, so you know the whole area, but I don't think you'll be surprised when I tell you there will never be a loan made in the whole Coachella Valley outside of the city limits of Indio or outside of the city limits of Palm Springs. And he said, this has nothing to do with what you plan. It's just that it's never going to happen.

PY: What year was this?

RB: This was 1945 when I bought it. And I said, well, I, you know, I come down here all the time to Palm Springs, but even Palm Springs isn't very active. So sure, you have a bank, but don't knock this area. This, too, can move out, you know, beyond Cathedral City. Oh, he said, we wouldn't even loan in Cathedral City. Well, okay. So I had to go outside of the area because the Bank of America was the only bank here. And I finally got a commitment for an unlimited number of houses. So I started it. They said, try forty first. We'll loan you the money for forty. And I had to get a loan because people, nobody's going to take cash out here. They want a low down payment and long-term period to pay in and with reasonable interest. I got six percent interest. So I ran ads and there was no television, but I ran ads in the newspapers and in the Los Angeles Times and suddenly a few people started coming out. And when they saw houses because there were none in this area, they were interested. And the prices were certainly reasonable in those days. So I finally sold the forty, and when I could see just ten houses left, I started another forty and I kept going that way and finally built, I think it was around three

hundred and some odd. And by that time commercial property started developing here. It finally took off.

PY: Who was your builder?

RB: Oh, I used a number of builders from Los Angeles. There was a[illegible]no[illegible] builder down here that would take on forty houses. Estella Ewarts Stella Yuritz' husband built probably ten houses for me, but he'd built one at a time and when that was finished and sold, then he'd build another one. That would have taken a lifetime. He was a rather good builder and I'd say out of my group of three fifty houses, he built about ten. But the others, I had, oh, builders that are dead today. Sandy Senus was one of the big builders. I got the building and loan to recommend builders they had liked and thought were successful and who could do mess. I called forty houses at the time mess at that time. Today it isn't. So I think it was probably four to five builders that I finally got to come down there. As a lawyer I represented a lot of the motion picture companies. And I first brought down some of the carpenters from Paramount who had time off and vacation. They thought they'd come down. They'd like to try it. And I did five houses with them. I thought maybe this is a better way than using these licensed contractors, but

their methods in a studio were so vastly different than this and the weather's so different. They did a good job, but it was slow and expensive. So that ended going it with a few. And I still decided I wanted to stay with forty at a time. And these developers were used to large . . . forty houses didn't mean anything to them. The first time that, I was awakened one, they started building in the summer which was a mistake. But they had their crews idle, so they wanted to start it in the summer. And I remember waking up one morning at three o'clock and heard the darndest noises and got out and here were forty trucks loaded with lumber coming down this street, Highway lll, and I got up, dressed, ran out. And they didn't know where they were going. I showed them where to go. And I had a problem on that because they just wanted to dump the, each truck of the forty trucks was for one house, total lumber for one house, so you can imagine how big they were. Well, they just wanted to dump them. I said, wait a minute. I have picked out the various lots where I want them and you're going to have to put them on the lot that I want them at. I haven't any way to move this after you dump it. So this started a little argument. We finally got the, all the

forty truckloads unloaded by night time and, of course, I learned a sad lesson then. And that is, don't build in the summer because these forty laid piles of lumber were laid there in the sun. The beams, for example, for the houses just by the time they started to build the houses and get ready for the beams, the beams were so twisted, they couldn't use them so they had to buy all new beams. The sun just makes a pretzel out of them. I learned that the hard way. But we got them built and got them sold. And then there was a little tiny shack on the corner that was included in my purchase. I made a real estate office out of that and started hiring some real estate people. I think I hired six or seven to start with and sales started moving and the word got out and it took off pretty well.

PY: How many bedrooms, how large were the houses?

RB: Two bedroom and three bedroom. I had to tell you what I sold them for. (laughter)

PY: What, about fourteen?

RB: I'd love to buy them back with what I sold them for. Oh, I think some of them got up to twenty-one five, but that was the highest. Some of them started at fourteen thousand, two bedroom.

PY: What kind of people were purchasing homes?

RB: Well, there was nobody that intended to live here. They were all people who thought the price was right. Remember, I was selling it on contract, twenty, twenty-five percent down, the balance over five or ten years, six percent interest. So they didn't have much to lose even if they walked away from it. But they were all people who, mostly they started out to be elderly people, who wanted to come down here because of the weather, not thinking of summer but thinking of winter. And then some of the younger families came down here. In fact they had children. And then that the man was for swimming pools, so I helped finance home, what is now homes swimming pool. And they did all the swimming pools for me and they put in, do forty houses and forty swimming pools all at the same time. Every house had a swimming pool. And they went over rather well once it got going. It looked pretty deserted, of course. People coming from, most of them came from Los Angeles. Boy, there's nothing around here, is there? Well, it's only ten miles to Indio and ten miles to Cathedral City and then Palm Springs. I would say they were pretty good gamblers at the time they bought.

PY: Was that the most development going on in the area? I mean, there's things in the . . .

RB: There was nothing. Oh, I guess, a year or two after I started, Glen Firestone and a number of fellows went with, oh, what's his name?

PY: Cliff Henderson.

RB: Cliff. Cliff talked them into buying a section of land over there and they put up the money. And he said he'd operate it and call it Palm Desert. So he started Palm Desert a couple of years after I started this. But he had an awful problem on the building and he kept saying, I don't understand how you get these houses up. I just do one at a time and it gets pretty expensive. I can't sell them at the prices like you're selling them for. Well, you have to do about forty at a time, Cliff. So I was active in Rotary and Rotary had me speak and Cliff had me speak at different places on how I did it. And then he started the same thing, trying to get, he couldn't get a loan. That was his problem, but he finally went and got a loan and started. But mine was the first venture where any substantial group were done at a time. It was usually more custom house. And then down the road Glen Firestone and the five fellows that put up the

money for that got a little dissatisfied with it because no money was coming in and it was all going out. And they came to me, just like Frank did here and wanted me to buy that whole thing out. That's my mistake number two. I should have done it.

PY: You were talking about that. Let's talk a little about what we were talking about before when Frank Bogert came to you with the Thunderbird Ranch.

RB: Yes. Well, as I told you, he, they offered it to me on unusually low terms and I turned it down, which was a big mistake.

PY: Why had they offered it to you? You said something about . . .

RB: Well, friends of mine, most of them were members of the Bohemian Club in San Francisco that I belonged to. We'd see each other every summer at the Bohemian Grove, and so I'd gotten to know them quite well, not in a business way, but in a sociable way. And knowing, Frank had told them that I owned this property next door, so it was logical that, I was the logical buyer all right. But instead finally they had a hard time selling it, but finally Frank thought of Johnny Dawson and he put together, raised the money from people in the south primarily for a golf course. And, of course, he's as competent in

laying out a golf course and that made it, that was the start really, what Dawson did at Thunderbird, in creating a golf course, eighteen-hole golf course, started the golf courses down here, in my opinion. Up until then, there was just a nine-hole in the city of Palm Springs. But certainly it proved that golf is needed down here with all the golf courses.

PY: Also a change in lifestyle, I think, too.

RB: And how!

PY: Gee, that wind is fierce!

RB: But I think this, I personally worry a little bit about the number of condominiums that are being built now, but I think this area is going to just continue to expand and grow. Values will keep going up, except for a slow period that I see during this summer.

PY: Why are you worried about the condominiums?

RB: Well, if the figure that I've heard is correct, and I've heard it from several sources, lending institutions, that they have under construction seventeen thousand five hundred condominiums, and it seems to me that that's just a little too many for the market to absorb, especially with the season ending. I don't think anybody is going to go broke, but I think they're going to hold on a long

time before they get rid of that many condominiums. And I think we have to, in the Wall Street Journal and every other source you can find, there's a slight depression going on. And probably deeper, so I don't think it's the time to be building a lot of condominiums, but they're doing it.

PY: Getting back to when you were building homes in Rancho Mirage, was there any problem getting materials in here?

RB: No, no problem at all. Got them all from sources in Los Angeles and had to pay, of course, extra prices on account of trucking so far, but there was no problem. Biggest problem in building for me was, there was no problem getting carpenters and plasterers and everything then was plastered, not the bat and board. So there was no trouble getting the workmen, but the problem was building in the summer, which I would never do again. It was not very pleasant for them. And so I'd find them sitting around on the ground drinking beer lots of the time. I lost a good many of the crew and I'd say, I don't think they were really putting in the time. If you want to start earlier in the morning, let's do that, but you're being well paid. I think you shouldn't be sitting around drinking beer. And a few of them said, you don't like it,

go buy it and they walked off. But we started finally around three o'clock in the morning and by noon they were all through. Then it worked out all right. But they were coming in about eight and nine in the morning to start and they were fighting that sun all day long. And I couldn't blame them for not liking it. I don't know how they're building now in the summer. There's building going on all summer. I wonder when they start. Maybe the crew that works down here now ~~are~~ were used to it so that they don't mind it.

PY: I don't think they start at three.

RB: I'm sure they don't do that. But these, the carpenters and employees that I hired to do my houses, all came, they weren't from this area, they came from all over. There just wasn't that need for that many carpenters.

PY: Did you have an architect for your homes?

RB: Yes, I had, I used seven different architects. I had seven different plans.

PY: L. A. architects?

RB: Los Angeles architects, yes. As I remember, there was nobody down here in that field. And varied them so that even though I'd build a group at one time you could drive around and couldn't tell that they were just mass produced,

which they really were. Seven different plans.

PY: For each forty?

RB: Yes. Then the prices were certainly cheap enough.

PY: Were there any stores in Rancho Mirage at that time?

RB: No. There were no stores. At that time they had to go to Indio or Cathedral City for any marketing, food.

PY: When did stores start popping up on 111?

RB: Let's see. I would say it was probably four or five years after I started these houses, that little stores started coming in. There was little date shops and things like that came in first. I've forgotten when the really nice one down here, Jergenson's, I've forgotten when they came in, but I'm sure that was ten years after I started building. And then, of course, Palm Desert started developing a few years after I did and markets started coming in there, too. So finally we didn't have to go to Palm Springs or Indio.

PY: I understand you had a lot to do with, if not directly at least indirectly, with incorporation here in Rancho Mirage.

RB: Yes, I was for it but I can't really say that I had a lot to do with it. I wasn't living down here then. I was all through developing, and I thought it was a great

idea and I did everything I could to encourage friends of mine to push it, but I think a man by the name of Rowitzer who was then active at Thunderbird Country Club, I think Bill Rowitzer had more to do with it than anybody.

PY: I've talked to him, yes.

RB: Oh. Well, you know, he lives here in Thunderbird. I think he really is responsible for it being accomplished. He's a very competent man. I don't know how he took the problems he had with the City Council. He's glad he's out of it.

PY: I'm sure. He's had it, I imagine.

RB: Yes, probably. I used to sit in some of those meetings and I just couldn't believe it, that a man of his caliber would take what he was taking. And he finally quit, you know. I think, oh, there are probably a good many others who helped, but at least I think he spearheaded it.

PY: Before you came, I understand from Helen Dengler that there had been some earlier developments here, that hadn't gotten off the ground for one reason or another.

RB: The only one I knew of was her place, Dengler's, what was his. Do they still own it?

PY: Yes.

RB: I thought they were selling it. Well, that was a small

forgotten what they called it now. It was a little ranch, halfway ranch or something like that. They had about ten acres, but it was not a guest ranch or anything. Then she finally came in and moved their CETA Travel Agency from New York out here and they bought more land and expanded. But that's the only development that started around here that I knew of until Thunderbird got going and then out that way where the Springs are.

PY: So you weren't familiar with Macomber earlier . . .

RB: No, not Macomber is the one who set up the trust that I told you about.

PY: Oh.

RB: Macomber was the first, he really is the father of Rancho Mirage. He's the one who picked the name and he had not the property I bought, but quite a bit of the property here, plus a lot of the property I bought over on the Indio side he had I bought. And I bought all of his interests.

PY: On the Indio side

RB: Well, in the hills. What's the name of the . . . if you take, go across the valley, what is the name of that community?

PY: Indio Hills?

RB: No. Well, some of it was in the Indio Hills, but there's a little town there, oh, I'd come down the highway and . . .

PY: Thousand Palms?

RB : Thousand Palms, yes. The property which he bought and which I bought over there was mostly in the Thousand Palms area. I bought quite a few acres. I bought all together, I think, it's about fifteen thousand acres, but that isn't all here. There's a lot of it over there.

PY: Can you tell me a little bit about him. No one seems to know very much.

RB: I never knew him. He was dead when I got into this. He had, if I remember, he didn't have any heirs, but to show you how bright this fellow was with his ideas, because he was way ahead of me. He did, he called it Rancho Mirage and had, well, not as much as I bought, but he had more than a section of land here at least that he started with. And then at the same time, he went over to the coast and I've forgotten the name of that, but it's one of the real expensive, it's not Newport Beach, but it's in that area. Emerald Bay. He started Emerald Bay at the same time, bought a section of land over there. His problem, I think his problem was he didn't do any development. All he did, well, he would cut into a few lots, he subdivided a few

lots. He did that here and he also did it at Emerald Bay. But never had any houses. And I think that was his first mistake. And the two of them didn't go very well. Emerald Bay didn't sell and this didn't sell, and he died when the bank took over and tried to operate it. But they only had one salesman down here, my friend, and he wasn't doing very well.

PY: Your friend lived in the house that was next to ~~Betty~~ Edna Warner's.

RB: Yes. It's a little frame house. It's still there. I remember when he sold it. He sold it for four thousand dollars, the house and lot. I told him he was crazy, but he just wanted out.

PY: So he and Frank Morgan had probably purchased property from, or that was part of the . . .

RB: I suspect he got his lot as part of a commission for acting as a salesman down there, and Frank Morgan, I'm sure, bought his lot from Culver, probably at five hundred dollars, something like that.

PY: There was another name which ~~Rose~~ Helen Dengler mentioned and that was Blankenhorn.

RB: Blankenhorn and I didn't, he had nothing to do with the development here, I know. He maybe owned a house or a

lot or two here. That's possible. I'd heard the name, but I never met him.

PY: Do you know how Macomber came on the name Rancho Mirage?

RB: I don't know how. I wish I knew. I think it's a great name that he picked. I wouldn't have thought of it. I don't know how he arrived at it, but that was a clever name I thought. And Emerald Bay for over there with the emerald color of the ocean. He must have been a PR man as well as someone who wanted to develop.

PY: Was that his last name?

RB: Macomber, M-A-C-O-M-B-E-R. I never met him. I talked to his son, he has a son that I think is probably still alive who worked for some large corporation in San Francisco, I talked to him on the phone in the old days. Yes, I did, because I had to see him. He had a beneficial interest, a small beneficial interest, that I had to see. Nice young fellow, not at all interested in that.

PY: Hadn't lived out here.

RB: No. As I remember, I don't think he'd even been down here. He inherited that little interest his father had. I was always very disappointed to see someone that has the intelligence and the gamble in him to risk a thing like this. Granted, he probably didn't involve money at that time, but I mean to have the foresight to come

down here and actually name a place Rancho Mirage and go over there as he did in the hills over there, which I bought all that, too. And visualize something that never developed but it could have. It will someday. He must have been quite a man. He was certainly a gambler.

PY: Have you developed any of the Thousand Palms area?

RB: No. No, it hasn't quite gotten to the point of being ready for it yet. It will one of these days. I have most of the, all of the palms, just for palms, all the palms around that property.

PY: You mean the oasis?

RB: Yes. He was smart enough to pick up property like that. I sold the county three sections of land a few years ago, which they're making, I don't know what they've done with it, but they definitely will do it. They're going to have a park there, recreation, and it's a beautiful oasis, but if they haven't done it by now, they will certainly develop it for picnic grounds, a beautiful spot.

PY: I understand that one of those oasis was the Bradshaw Stagecoach Line.

RB: Now that I don't know. It could be. But there's ample water there, and the motion picture industry has used

one of the sections all the time where there are a lot of palms. Washingtonia palms I think they're called. They used to rent from me. That's how I knew the picture industry used them for a lot of their settings.

PY: You talked earlier when we were looking at the aerial photograph over there about the community pool that you had built.

RB: Oh, yes. It's still there. I think the people that I sold to, I don't think they ever opened it. I think they closed it down. It was too expensive. But when I had it, I maintained the pool, kept it clean. And it was a community, it was a great thing for the community. There ~~was~~ were no swimming pools down here at that time, and until I started the building of houses, each one had a pool. But there was no community pool, so if someone didn't have a pool, there was no place to go. So I put in a real professional size pool. It's a big one.

PY: So you put it in prior to the building of houses? Is that it?

RB: I put it in before houses started, yes. And then I put a pool with each house that I built, oh, with some exceptions. I found some people didn't want to pay for a pool or didn't care for a pool. I was a little off on

that. I started doing it with every house and quit because some of them, oh, we'd like the house but we don't want to go to the expense of a pool and keeping it up. I think they've abandoned, I don't know who owns that pool, somebody because the pool was zoned commercial because it goes from the swimming pool clear down to Sahara Road. And it's a good commercial spot. I imagine whoever bought it plans for an apartment because the pool itself is very large.

PY: What street is it on?

RB: It's on, it's this one where you saw on there a circle, there houses all around that circle and the swimming pool is in the middle.

PY: So that's developed?

RB: Sahara and the Velt. You go up the Velt to Sahara, you look right into the pool. And I did some houses right around the pool. They're still there.

PY: Was there any bad feeling on the part of . . .

TAPE 1, SIDE 2:

PY: That feeling at all on the part of residents living around Rancho Rio Del Sol area.

RB: You mean toward this development?

PY: Right. To the fact that Rancho Mirage was being developed and they were agricultural.

RB: No. No, I don't think so. There's only one man that I think still lives over there and he's on the City Council. He's an oldtimer in the desert. He would have been one man who would have objected to this city development.

PY: Lloyd Tevis?

RB: Lloyd Tevis, sure. As a matter of fact, I saw Lloyd at City Hall about six months ago, and he's an old friend of mine now. And he said, you know, Ronald, you made a horrible mistake when you were developing Rancho Mirage. I'd put on an eighty-acre development and I called it Rancho Mirage Annex No. 2 on the other side of the highway. And that, of course, was getting down in his area, and he said, I think you made a horrible mistake to just cut those into lots. You mean they aren't large enough? I cut them into a hundred by two hundred feet, Lloyd. Oh, that's isn't what I mean. It should have been a horse place. You should have subdivided into little ranches and it would have gone just like hotcakes. It's true. It was the last to sell. People wanted to be up high instead of down there, and maybe a horse setup would have done it, but I didn't know that many horsemen

around here at that time. But Lloyd is a typical horseman. He loves horses, might even to how to play polo. But I don't blame him. But he said, he would have, I'm sure, without every telling me, he objected to seeing this develop. I'm quite sure of that. As a matter of fact, he told me that day, six months ago, that he was going to sell his ranch and get out; it was too citified for him. I don't know where he's going to go, but he says it's way too cluttered for him. He likes horses and he likes the quiet, peaceful life and I guess they've taken it away from him over there. There's a lot of development along that street that he's on.

PY: Yes, Clancey Lane.

RB: Clancey Lane, yes. He's right on the corner. I notice he has it for sale, but it hasn't sold. He's a very intelligent, very nice person. But he's by nature a conservative type so far as development is concerned. He would like to see no development at all, I would think. But I'm afraid it's gotten ahead of him. I told him that day, Lloyd ~~and I are~~ you'll never find it again going to find ~~that~~ it's the Rancho Mirage area that you found when you moved here. I don't think unless you just keep moving down toward the Salton Sea. Oh, he said, I'll find a

place. I have my place up for sale. I've got to get someplace where it isn't so crowded. And I don't blame anybody for feeling that way.

PY: He is kind of crowded in the area there.

RB: He's a little crowded (chuckle)

PY: Yes. What do you think actually spurred the development of this area the most?

RB: I think the climate. I really think it was the climate. Mr. Stevens, who we represented who had built the El Mirador, I think he's the one that took the big risk. There was nothing except . . .

PY: Desert Inn?

RB: Desert Inn. But I think it was very successful, the El Mirador Hotel. As a matter of fact, I knew it so well having represented him, that he finally decided to sell it, and he sold it to a group that one of the law partners in the firm I was with, Warren Kinney, was, then we were representing the Mattson line and they had the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. And Kinney, they were having trouble getting a good manager, and he left the law firm, then went over to manage the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. And he was the manager there for, oh, at least ten years. And he finally got interested and got a group to buy from

Stevens the El Mirador Hotel. And Warren Kinney left the Royal Hawaiian, came over and ran the hotel here. So you can see it was more and more becoming popular in Palm Springs. Boy, I remember when I was representing Mr. Stevens, you could buy any lot, business lot, zoned business on Palm Canyon for a hundred dollars a lot. And nobody was buying them. (chuckle)

PY: Those were the days of vision.

RB: Well, those were the days it happened all over the world, I'll bet. Somebody has to start.

PY: Yes.

RB: Mr. Shumann, Erwin Shumann, lives in that house right in front of me. And he had the ChiChi, you know. He was what I would call another pioneer down here, too, in a different way, his restaurants. I thought he was gambling a little bit when he built the hotel which is, he's now sold to the Hilton. They call it the Hilton in Palm Springs.

PY: Oh, the Riviera.

RB: The Riviera.

PY: Yes.

RB: I thought he was reaching out a little bit with that one, but he was right. Bought forty acres and really has made

it pay.

PY: Do you think that, what actual event or project here made Rancho, put Rancho Mirage on the map?

RB: Well.

PY: Or has it been a slow growth?

RB: I think it's been a very slow growth. There was no real rush. There was one time after I started building here, a gentleman, his name I can't recall, but he was Jewish. And he came out to see me and he said, he introduced himself, and he said, I'm Jewish. So what? Well, he said, I just wondered, would you sell a house or a lot here to me? Oh, come right in. I'll be glad to sell you as many houses and lots as you want. Why do you ask that? Well, in Palm Springs, and I've always understood and my friends have always understood that Rancho Mirage had a policy of not taking any Jews. Oh, I said, I don't know, maybe that was prior to me. I can't believe it because there wasn't any development here. I just bought practically raw land. I don't know where you got that idea. I said, in order to remove any doubts about it, come on in and you can buy up any lots you want. No, I don't want to buy anything. I just was curious to know if that was true. Well, I can tell you it is not true.

I don't know what Macomber who had it before me, but I can't believe he would say a thing like that. But then several people after that asked me that same question, so maybe that held this back a little bit if that was the attitude because certainly in those days it was largely Jewish people in Palm Springs as I remember.

PY: Because of the film industry?

RB: I suppose that was it, yes. Those nicer homes built up in Las Palmas. They were a lot of the picture people. Jack Warner, Bill went up there, I know. I did a lot of legal work for Warner Brothers. Yes, I, to give you a more intelligent question on why this area developed, I think it was because Palm Springs developed so big, became so well known, actually worldwide. But gradually a movement just followed. And I think part of the success out in this area, in the Rancho Mirage area, has been that it got too crowded in Palm Springs for some people who didn't like crowding and they kept coming out to get away from it all. And there are many people now who think this is too crowded and they'll go on (chuckle) elsewhere.

PY: When Macomber had named this area Rancho Mirage, was it a feeling just that he was naming that section that he

was trying to develop or was he naming an area that included Thunderbird Ranch and included Rio Del Sol area.

RB: No, I think, well, of course, I have no idea what was in his mind, but what he had at that time was one section of land. So that was his Rancho Mirage. I don't know what he dreamed of beyond that.

PY: When you came in, though, how did you feel about Rancho Mirage and how did others in the area feel?

RB: Well, when I came in, I liked the name and I kept the name, and I publicized the name. But I kept buying more and more property, and the whole thing as far as I'm concerned was Rancho Mirage.

PY: So the Rio Del Sol area was Rancho Mirage to you?

RB: Yes.

PY: And this was Rancho Mirage?

RB: Yes. I visualize Rancho Mirage as any place where I bought a section of land. (laughter) And as I say, I finally got up to five thousand acres in this area.

PY: Well, that's a good section of Rancho Mirage.

RB: Yes, it's a pretty good one. One of these days, I think the, well, Indio is already its own development, but straight across at Thousand Palms, for example, I think that will take off one of these days. I'll probably, I

don't want to do it, but somebody younger will start in and make that another spot like this, I think. I think the climate, you can't beat this climate down here. I've lived, when I was developing I was down here, I had a house down here and stayed here most of the time until I got the houses finished. And I did forty at the time, so I was here at least through two full summers, which I don't recommend for anybody for fun. But we didn't have any air conditioning. Had just these swamp coolers. But now with air conditioning, I don't think, air conditioned cars, air conditioned houses, I think that also brought more people here that stay year round. I know a lot of people who would never think of going into town, into Los Angeles.

PY: Where were you living at the time you were selling houses?

RB: In Los Angeles.

PY: You said you had several realtors on your sales staff.

RB: Well, one of them was Don Cameron.

PY: Oh!

RB: He was the starter. He was my first salesman and he married Isabell Cameron. She became a real estate person down here.

PY: But Don had been here previously to you.

RB: Don was here, if Don were alive today, he'd tell you about Macomber because he was here with Frank Macomber. And Macomber first bought. And he sold the lot. And he sold the actor, what's his name that you spoke of.

PY: Oh, Morgan.

RB: He sold Frank Morgan his lot.

PY: So he was working for Macomber.

RB: He was working for Macomber at the time. Well, actually, I guess Macomber didn't stay in this picture very long apparently because it was taken over by Citizens National Trust and Savings Bank when Macomber set up this big trust. That's probably where he made his money was on trust. There were several hundred beneficial interests, as I told you, scattered all over the world.

PY: Can you describe what that action is? I don't quite understand it.

RB: Well, for example, he incorporated in the name of Rancho Mirage. And he would set up, he'd sell stock in the corporation. He'd also sell a beneficial interest where you didn't own any stock. And he'd have a first beneficial interest, a second beneficial interest, a third beneficial interest, and he got down to a fifth beneficial interest

which is why there were so many people involved. And the further down the line that the beneficial interest became, say fourth or fifth, his price obviously for a beneficial interest went way down. I have no idea what he got for the whole package, but he sold all his beneficial interests, that's what he was doing. Selling stock and selling beneficial interests when he died.

PY: But the corporation itself owned the property?

RB: Yes, the corporation owned the property. And the bank was the trustee for the operation of the processing of the property and they're the ones who hired Culvert to sell some of the lots that they had subdivided. And I don't think he sold any, but he hired this Don Cameron fellow who was a very nice person. I grew very fond of him.

PY: Then St. Leon's was working with you, too?

RB: Mrs. St. Leon was my secretary, my personal secretary, in my law office, and it was a pretty big law office. And I couldn't find a decent secretary down here. They had plenty of them in Los Angeles, but a legal secretary down there in those days, forget it. There was no such animal. And when I would try to get someone from Los Angeles to come down, they'd come down and take one look

and say, no thank you. No, we don't want to leave the city. Well, I was talking to her one day about it and said, would you, I'm in a spot, I need someone down there and I can't seem to find anybody. Would you consider going down there, at least temporarily? Well, her husband was Roy St. Leon. And I've forgotten what business he was in. He was a salesman. I've forgotten what the business was. She said, if he would go, I would, you know, I would go. Because she had been down here with me several times and rather liked it. But she said, there's nothing for him to do down there. You'd have to then not only pay me what you're paying me, but you'd have to hire Roy as a salesman then. I said, well, that's what he's doing now is selling, isn't it? Yes. Well, he can sell real estate just as well as he's selling whatever he's selling. So they came down, and she was my secretary and he was number two salesman under Don Cameron. It was very hard to get any help down there at that time, permanent. I don't know how it is now. I imagine it's very easy. Although Paul Lazar was a tenent of mine for eighteen years here. He just moved into a big building he built down there at City Hall. But he always had a big problem he told me hiring, and he only

moved a couple of months ago. For eighteen years he said it was just horrible trying to hire a secretary. And he did a big business. He did a great business as a decorator. I don't know why it's so hard. Maybe today it isn't, but in the beginning it was impossible to hire a secretary. The money was no object. It was just they didn't want to come down here. But I'm sure that isn't true today.

PY: You said he was a tenant. What building?

RB: I have a building, I own, well, among the things I subdivided are those four corners where the restaurant is and Security Bank. I sold those last year to them. And then I have the opposite corner where Standard Oil is, five acres. And a couple of acres on the other corner and I built a building there. Laddie Sabola, a real estate man, is in it. It's just four stories. Paul had three of them and Laddie had one of them. Paul was there eighteen years. He started out down here, to show you how success can follow you down here if you're willing to work, he came down here with no money except he had the talent as a decorator. He'd gone through that school and knew the business. He had no contacts down here. He had a rickety old station wagon when he first bumped into me, and he was selling things out of the back

of his station wagon. He'd go in to see if you needed any decorating done, and he'd have samples of materials or furniture and drapes and have it in the back of his car. And he operated down in that, out of that station wagon for about two or three years. And did it fairly well to the point that finally he said, I need a, came to me and he said, I need some store space now. Would you rent me a store? I happened to have one vacancy, so I said yes. He started with one store. That's a very interesting story on that little building because Vee Nicely was in there before Paul was, and you know her, she's an excellent decorator and has her own building, is now leasing it out. But she preceded him in that building. And then he came along, rented one, then two, and then finally, as tenants moved out, he said, I need them all. But I wouldn't kick Laddie out. He was my first tenant. So Paul had three of the four stories until he built this building. But he should have done very well down here because he had almost an exclusive deal over at the, not the Springs, but the High Rise.

PY: Desert Island?

RB: Yes. I think Paul had almost exclusive job. He did all of the models there, and then from those models, of

course, he got other business. So that in itself shows how business has grown here, not only have property values gone up, but every other business is good down here. I still think it's the climate. I was talking to my secretary yesterday and she said, "Is the weather pretty bad down there?" And I said, "No, it's beautiful. Little windy, but that's all." "Well," she said, "it's raining and foggy and terrible here. It's been damp and cold weather since you left." Well, people who like the sun are going to get out of that, come down here at least for awhile. I think that's the draw here, is the climate.

PY: Do you think we're drawing more people then from L. A. as opposed to the east of midwest?

RB: Yes, I think in numbers it will always be Los Angeles because it's the closest. You can drive down in two hours. But the Canadians have certainly discovered it, and certainly the New Yorkers. At El Dorado, where I was a charter member, and here at Thunderbird I was a charter member, I would say there's as many of the members here from the east as there are from Los Angeles. Thunderbird started out mostly as Los Angeles crowd, but now it's less Los Angeles and more easterners. And El Dorado, all the people who have their homes there, I think

they're Los Angeles. But just in the membership of it, the members, it's largely it's eastern people, who look forward to coming out a month or two a year.

PY: Now you mentioned one thing, that L. A. is so close and that, did it always seem to be that close on the roads

RB: No, because there were dirt roads when I was coming down to the El Mirador on legal matters for him. It was a dirt road. The minute you turned off to come into Palm Springs, that was all dirt. And it was a bad two-lane road. I always figured five hours coming from Los Angeles to the El Mirador. Not because there was a lot of traffic, but it was just bad roads.

PY: Is that one of the things then that you felt kept people away for a long time?

RB: Well, I think that was one of the things that prevented it from being discovered by any numbers. But the minute they got started with the freeways, then the word went out and you could drive it. I'd go from Beverly Hills to here in two hours. Beautiful roads, as you know, so problem about transportation.

PY: Did your position as State Treasurer have any effect on the area when you lived here?

RB: No. It had a great effect on me, however. I should never have taken it. Governor Knight talked me into it. And I said, really, first of all I have a pretty good sized law office in Hollywood, and secondly I have a big development down in the desert that I have to keep my fingers on. I had twenty-one salesmen at that time. And he said, "This is the time when the Legislature has decided to kick out that Gus Johnson," who'd been in thirty years as Treasurer. They thought he was too old, and they actually really kicked him out. And this caused quite a mess up in Sacramento in the Legislature because they liked the old man, but just his day had finished. And they got in this hassle and finally the Legislature almost unanimously really kicked him out of office. It was a constitutional office, but they did it. And I got a call here. I was still doing these houses. It was bad enough just to go back and forth to Los Angeles all the time and still keep my finger on this, and also my law practice. I got a call from Governor Knight from Los Angeles, and I happened to be down here. And he wanted to know if I could meet him for dinner. We'd been fairly close. And I said, yes, what is it about? Well, it's rather important, a state matter. I'd like to talk

to you about it. I can't do it on the telephone. I said, all right. So I went up for dinner. We had dinner and he was telling around some speech. He was always making speeches. And he said, "I'll tell you what I'd like to do. I have something really important I have to talk to you about, but let's get in the plane and talk as we fly up to Sacramento." "Come on, I've got to be back in the desert tomorrow, Goodie, I can't do that." "Well, I'll see that the plane can turn right around and bring you right back home and drop you at Palm Springs if that's where you want to go." Well, the only problem that I had is my car happens to be in Los Angeles. But I did it anyway. And he talked about everything but what it was about for awhile. Finally, I said, "You know, I don't know how long it takes this plane to get to Sacramento, but I really have to turn right around and come back, so what was it you really wanted to talk to me about?" "Well, you're familiar with what has happened to Gus Johnson and the Legislature. It just happened this week." "Yes, I read about it." "Well," he said, "you know, he's been the only Treasurer of the State of California in the history of the State of California. Did you know that?" No, I didn't. I

knew he'd been in there for years, but I never have met him. No, I really didn't know he was the first Treasurer. "Yes, he was. Been in all those years. It was pretty tough to kick him off, but the Legislature did it. And now I have to, it's done, I've got to get a Treasurer to take his place." "Oh, that shouldn't be very hard. It's a constitutional office, isn't it?" And he said, "Yes." "Well, I wouldn't think that would be too difficult." He said, "Well, I want you. I want you in there because you've been very active in the republican party and you're well known and you've never run for political office which is good. You're a successful businessman and, you know, I've known you for a long time so please say yes." And I said, "Goodie, how can I do it with a law office and this down in the desert. Oh, you'll get somebody to run it." "No, I cannot do it." "Well," he said, "I'll tell you this, I'll see that you are taken in my plane to the desert or wherever you have to go, Los Angeles or the desert, once a week. Is that fair enough?" That I maybe could live with for awhile. Well, it never happened because that office was in such a mess, it took me two years to even get it straightened out. It was horrible. They would sell, oh say, several million dollars'

worth of state bonds, which general obligation bonds, which is one of the duties of the Treasurer. And he didn't do anything to sell them. He just, they had this newspaper put out in New York called The Bond Buyer, and he'd run a little thing like that in The Bond Buyer. He was selling two million or five million dollars' worth of California bonds. And to me it's a miracle, it's to the credit of the state that they ever sold them because he never did anything. That's one of the things the Legislature really threw him out for. So I got into it and it was in such a horrible mess. The easterners at the banks were all laughing at the way the office had been operating. And you realize a state as big as California being operated like that horse and buggy deal. I went up to San Francisco and talked to the lawyers who certified the bonds of the State of California, and they were experts and one of the biggest law firms in San Francisco. He said, do you realize that there's never been any effort to sell these California bonds? We really didn't follow them, we just had to certify as to the quality of the bonds so that banks and others will buy them. But as far as selling, we really haven't had anything to do with that, and we wouldn't want to, but

we just wanted to get the legal angle on it, the opinion which goes on the bond. Well, I said, I can tell you from my experience which is short Johnson, the Treasurer, never left the capital, and he didn't do anything except take a little thing, I had it to show them, in The Bond Buyer. That didn't make sense to me. Does it to you? Well, I guess if that's the way he did it, I guess he figured that was the way to do it. Well, I don't think it's the way to do it. And that's what I'd like to get your opinion on. Can you see any objection to my hiring a good PR man and putting out a brochure telling the facts about the state of California and its credit? And then distributing them all over the east, wherever The Bond Buyer, wherever the bonds are sold to the banks and the insurance companies. And then I would like to go back and hold meetings before every sale and talk to them about the credit of the state of California. All I want your opinion on, I know it hasn't been done, but can you see anything legally wrong with it or practically wrong with it? No, gee, I don't know why someone hasn't thought of that before. I think that's a great idea. So I said, very good, I'm going to start. Well, that office has nobody that would be competent as a PR man to prepare

brochure. And so I started talking with the press and I found out that Lloyd Locken was head of the UP in Washington, D.C. and was considered one of the bright men in the field. I liked what I heard about him and could find out about him because he had a very technical mind and was a very deep, deep fellow, not just a writer. So I flew back there and talked to him, and I was very impressed with him. Told him what I wanted to do and he said, well, that would be a very interesting I said, well, I've got to get it through the Legislature because there's never been anybody employed for that. I can't offer you the job, but what do you want? And he told me because I'd have to have more than I'm getting here, naturally. My family is here. So I got them to pay him what was a very acceptable salary to him. I had to get that through the Legislature which took a little doing. And then I hired him, he came out and he started to work right away on a brochure, and he did a beautiful job with pictures and with statistics, and it was a real research job. But he'd spent a couple of months on each bond sale. And then we distributed sale, sent them all over the country, even some of them to Europe. And no more of this little thing in The Bond Buyer. And the

first time I went back to New York, I had, of course, written all the banks and insurance companies that I was coming to set up appointments with them. The first one was with City National being the largest bank there and they were the largest buyer of our bonds anyway. So I talked to the president, told him I was coming back and that I'd like to talk to a group he could get together in the banking fraternity and tell them the affairs of the state as well as they could have these brochures in their hands as they came. And he said, well, that's never been done. That's very interesting. Certainly, we'll be glad to set up a lunch, I'll set up a luncheon for you. And I took Lloyd Lattenback with me and I went in an hour early to visit with the president, and he said, I don't know whether you realize what you're walking into, but you're walking into something today. Well, yes. Well, since this luncheon I've had an acceptance from everybody in the field in New York, and we're going to have a hundred and twenty-five, I think it was, top men of either presidents of banks, presidents of insurance companies, and they're all coming to hear what you have to say. This has never been done. And he said, I don't need to tell you how sharp these people are. I

hope you know what you're talking about when you talk. Well, all I can talk about is California and the credit of the state. That's all I'm here for. So I'm delighted. The more the better because I was going to set up appointments with a lot of these people you're talking about. Oh, well, they'll all be here. And he said, I think the main reason they're going to be here is because it's never been done. They're just curious to see what's going to happen. Well, nothing happened except I distributed all these brochures which were about, oh I guess, fifteen, twenty pages of diagrams and statistics and it was in color and it was beautiful. And then I got up after having them distributed to all of them and talked about the credit of the state of California for about a half hour. I'm at your disposal. Ask me any question you want. And I don't know whether I can answer it, but I'll try. Boy, they really fired the questions at me, but I was, I had been in business all my life, more businessman than a lawyer, I must say. And I'd always worked in the financial field in the law angle. So I didn't have any trouble with them, and they were very courteous, very nice to me. It was so unique apparently that Business Week did a whole picture on the cover and the

whole story about me. They had a photographer there taking pictures. They ran quite a story on it which I was kind of proud of. I actually bought a lot of reprints and Goodie forced me into saying I had to run again. And I said, no way, but I did. I used those as my literature. That's all I could tell about myself. But now it's all of the, after that I was invited to speak at the National Association of State Treasurers. And they all wanted to know what this was all about and what I did. They all liked the idea so they all started to do the same thing. It was so simple that it didn't take any brilliance to figure that one out. (chuckle) But I think they're selling millions of dollars' worth of bonds on the state of California and it's taken a little ahead of The Bond Buyer. There's a lot of competition for general obligations bonds, corporations and cities and counties and states. Boy, to just do that, I just couldn't understand that. And, but funny enough, nobody had done it. No State Treasurer of all our states had ever done it. No City Treasurer, no County, I just couldn't believe it. They all did exactly what Gus Johnson did, they took a little ad in The Bond Buyer. Some of them would go that big, and that was it. I think

they've all gone into this same treatment by now, long ago actually.

PY: So once again you were a pioneer.

RB: What?

PY: So once again you were a pioneer.

RB: I pioneered that one. (chuckle) But I had the approval of the law firm that had passed on the bonds and knew the whole history of sale of California bonds. I couldn't understand why they themselves didn't mention it. They thought it was such a great idea. I couldn't understand why they hadn't talked to Gus Johnson about it. But I never mentioned it to them. But I learned long after he was out that he was quite a character. He started in the horse and buggy days as Treasurer, almost at the beginning, yes, he was the first Treasurer the state ever had. And he had a lot of cute little tricks that the Legislature got onto they didn't like. The banks didn't like it, I discovered. He had a widows' and orphans' fund, and he would go to all of the major banks, not the little but the big ones, and say, well, this is the time of year when I have to come in soliciting help for the widows and orphans. And I'm sure they were smart enough to know what he was doing. There were no

widows and orphans, but he got quite substantial sums from the banks for his widow and orphan fund. And it was that that the Legislature really kicked him out for. That's pretty raw, I think. But he, apparently, the banks told me after I went in they'd been doing this for years. And I said, I don't understand why you didn't stop it. Well, come on, he controlled where all the money, the state money, went. He'd put it in our banks and by lending free I got myself in trouble, but I discovered he didn't get any interest. Just we put the money in certain of the big banks, so I got ahold of Parke Bicey, he was president of B of A, I figured you can't get any higher than that, and asked him, he knew this is what was going on. Well, I'm not sure I can say I know about it, but I've heard that it's going on. We don't like it, but, well, it isn't going to happen anymore, I'll tell you that. But I said I notice that all the banks don't have state money. You have. Security Bank has. About six of the big banks have all the state money without interest. Oh, I don't know about that. Yes, we have substantial sums of state money. We do pay, I've forgotten what it is, a nominal amount of interest. Well, I said, I'd, you may not like it, but I'm going to

change this because I don't care whether I'm State Treasurer or not, but while I am I think it ought to be distributed to every bank in the state, big and little

TAPE 2, SIDE 1:

RB: salaries and so forth. And it worked out all right, although I didn't become very popular. The small banks were very happy, but the large ones were not quite so happy.

PY: Is that a policy which has continued in California?

RB: Yes. Oh, yes. It's based on their capitalization that every bank has the same vote. If you're the biggest, you get the biggest amount of the state's . . . and you can imagine the money that the state has. It's tremendous. And, of course, the banks in the state help the bonds, too. I'm sure that no bank suggested that operation that Johnson had. State Treasurer comes in, an official of the state, one of the four constitutional officers, and says this is the way it's going to be, I can understand why they wouldn't quarrel with it particularly. But now I think they are all very happy with the setup. I must say that any time you touch the pocketbook you hurt somebody, and there were a lot of the

bankers that really aren't too happy about what I did. I didn't find any great support from the banks when I ran for re-election. It happened to be the year when Noland was defeated for Governor and Pat Brown went in. That was the year. I guess it would have happened anyway, but Pat, Noland lost by a million one hundred thousand to Pat Brown and I was the low man on the totem pole. I lost by seventy-five thousand, but I still lost. By a young kid that, in San Diego, who, I think I heard he was twenty or twenty-one, he got elected and all he ever did was he had five or six kids, and he had colored postcards made of the family. And that was his literature, so he was smarter than I was. But he never would have gotten it. He didn't know anything about the job at all. He wouldn't have gotten elected if it hadn't been for a landslide. It's just the democrats swept it clean.

PY: I take it that the State Treasury survived.

RB: Oh yes. Yes. Now it's a democrat, of course, that was former head of the Legislature. How could I forget his name? Anyway, he was one of the sharpest Senators in the Senate. He was the speaker of the Senate, very sharp. And he's now State Treasurer. Jess Unruh, Jess Unruh. And I suspect that will be a stepping stone for

him because he is a political animal and he will be using that to run for Governor or something when the time comes. So the Treasurer's office survived and I'm sure it's . . . oh, yes, they'll just keep carrying on with the program, the bonds will always be sold at a good price and the state will be earning money and on all that money. It's more than just a big vault downstairs filled with money. I enjoyed it, and financially it was in terrible shape. Paid, at that time the State Treasurer got fourteen thousand dollars a year. That something? I think today it's forty-nine thousand.

PY: I take it everything out here survived.

RB: Oh, yes. Yes. It was a little difficult, but it worked out.

PY: Did Rancho Mirage ever get any publicity because of your being Treasurer and connected with the area?

RB: I don't think so. The name Treasurer was so unknown to people, I don't think anybody down, there was only one person that I think was interested in my campaign and she was a democrat. And she had a house right next to Frank Morgan. I don't know whether she's still . . .

PY: Amy Croft.

RB: Amy Croft. That's it. I came down here one time to get

a little rest and we had a house down here. And I thought, gee, it's kind of nice to come home to a lot of people that know me and like me. And how wrong I was. I happened to drive along there and here was a great big billboard, Bets For Betz. He was my opponent. And I thought, boy, this is really great. Nothing that says anything for Button, but there's a nice big billboard that says vote for Betz. And I, she didn't like me for some reason or other, I guess because I was a republican. She was a very active democrat and if she's alive today, I'll bet she's one of the spearheads of the democratic party.

PY: It's true.

RB: Is it true?

PY: It's true.

RB: Well, gad, she must be pretty old by now.

PY: I think she will be ninety-two this year.

RB: Incredible woman.

PY: Doesn't stop her.

RB: Oh, absolutely incredible.

PY: Mrs. Democrat, that's for sure.

RB: She is, sure. I'll be she runs it down here at least.

PY: Oh yes.

RB: Well, she's quite a woman. I couldn't blame her when I found out she was a real active democrat, how can you fault that? She has a right to oppose me. But I used to talk to her about it after. But so far as I'm concerned, you were responsible for wiping me out here in my own little community. (laughter) She said, well I sure tried to. Oh, I said, I don't think it hurt me because I'd lost anyway. But it would have been kind of nice to know at least I won in one place I got started with. No, she said, it's nothing personal. I'm a democrat. I always will be a democrat. And I always still try to run it. And certainly this area I can vote.

PY: That's true. She . . .

RB: And I'll bet she does.

PY: She campaigned personally at the last election.

RB: Did she?

PY: Got out there, stomped around and, you know, she's ninety . . .

RB: How old is she? Ninety.

PY: Two, she'll be ninety-two this year.

RB: That is incredible. Well, as I remember, she was gray-haired, thin, even then, and not a young woman by any means.

PY: So you had staunch competition when you came back here.

RB: Oh boy, I didn't, I tried to look the other way. I didn't want to put any stickers of mine around. I think she, they were all torn down. I just stayed quiet about politics. There weren't enough people in the area to make much difference anyway, but she was one of the first people in Rancho Mirage.

PY: I think she's been here about thirty-six years.

RB: Yes. I wouldn't be a bit surprised. Maybe she, let's see, I bought this is 1945. She could have had a house, she's right along near Frank Morgan, isn't she? I said there were two houses. She could have had a house there, too. There might have been three houses in there when I bought Rancho Mirage because I know I didn't sell her a lot. Could well be. She probably here before I got here.

PY: They bought a house that was already built, so I imagine so.

RB: Could have been, yes. There's another old house right near her. Could have been four houses here. I'd forgotten that. Macomber had done something, at least he sold . . .

PY: A couple.

RB: A few lots.

PY: Do you know where he got that land previously? Was that Southern Pacific land or anything?

RB: I have a hunch that it was.

PY: Do you think he purchased it directly from the railroad or do you think he bought it from someone else?

RB: No, I think he was the original owner, and I would suspect he got it from the railroad. Something like that. It's incredible when you look back, and I'll bet this has happened all over the United States, cities have grown up on land that was for nothing practically in the old days. That's one of the great things about this country. Anybody can make it if they're willing to dig a little. Isn't that true?

PY: Very true. Anything we haven't covered about Rancho Mirage that you'd like to add?

RB: No. Only this comment that I think Rancho Mirage will be solidly built just like Palm Desert and all the other cities will be because of the climate.

PY: Mainly with seasonal people or do you think people are going to be starting to stay year round?

RB: I think more and more people must have already decided to stay year round. I know that that certainly was not true when I was developing because without air conditioning

with just these swamp coolers it wasn't very nice, but now with air conditioning improved like it is I would think there's no reason why it can't be year round. I come down here all during the summer. Very warm but people living here I'm sure get accustomed to it. Do you stay down here in the summer?

PY: Partially.

RB: If you're here when it starts that bad spell, you don't notice it as much as if you came from San Francisco or Los Angeles into it. Then you really feel it. Well, I hope I've given you some background on it.

PY: Oh, very much so.

END OF INTERVIEW